



HOW TO...

Use the Clone tool

If there's a part of a picture you're not happy with, it's easy to lift inspiration from elsewhere in the image. Adam Banks explains how to apply quick fixes with the help of the Clone tool

When you need to remove something unwanted from a photograph or move an object around, all you need is the Clone tool, which is available in all decent image editors. The idea is that you paint one part of an image over another.

Just select the Clone tool – called the Clone Stamp in Photoshop and Photoshop Elements – and click on the area you want to use as your 'paint', known as the source, while holding down a modifier key. In Serif PhotoPlus, which is used in our example, this key is Shift. Then move the cursor to the area you want to paint over, and click and drag to copy pixels from around the source point. A crosshair shows where you're copying from; this moves around with your cursor so, as you continue painting, you build up a copy of a larger area. You can usually choose from the same range of brush tips as for normal painting. By picking a soft, round brush you can apply the copied pixels seamlessly.

There are two basic cloning modes: aligned and non-aligned. Non-aligned cloning allows you to select a spot in the image to clone by right-clicking or pressing a key like Shift. This spot is called the source, which may be indicated by a crosshair on the screen. When you drag the cloning tool over another part of the image the crosshair moves relative to your cursor. The image underneath the crosshair appears on the image under your cursor. Let go of the mouse button and the crosshair snaps back to its original spot. To change the source area you need to press the Shift or Alt key again. Aligned cloning is virtually the same, except that when you

release the mouse button the source doesn't snap back to its original spot. Instead, it follows the cursors around, remaining at the same relative position.

In our example we used Serif PhotoPlus 6, which you can download from www.freerisef software.com. You can use the same principles in any image editor with a Clone tool.

1 In this photo, the man with a windbreak on the left distracts from the main subject. To remove him, choose the Clone tool from PhotoPlus's main toolbox.

2 Options are set in the Tool Properties tab; all tabs are accessible from the View menu. Leave the blending mode and opacity at their default values – Normal and 100% – and make sure Aligned is ticked. Identify an area you can use to clone over the unwanted figure. It will often take more than one source to do the job. Start with the trickiest area. In our example, it's where the man's torso is in front of the dune. You need to continue the diagonal line of the grass. Holding the Shift key, click on this line a little outside the man's figure, making sure there's enough space at one side to cover the full width of his body.

3 Releasing the Shift key, click on the grass line where it hits the edge of the torso. By clicking on the line both when selecting the source and starting to paint, you ensure the cloned area will line up. Drag to the left, scrubbing the



THE CLONE TOOL AT A GLANCE

- The Clone tool lets you copy one area of an image over another, painting interactively so you can govern exactly where the duplicated pixels go.
- Reproducing the same area repeatedly will give the game away; use the Aligned option to help prevent this.
- You can clone objects, people or buildings, as well as background areas, depending on what you need to alter in your photo.

mouse up and down a little way, to paint out the body. When you start painting, you'll see how wide an area the brush covers as you drag; if necessary, adjust its size using the Brush Tip tab, making sure you choose a soft (blurred) brush. You can continue upwards to paint grass over the man's head, but don't move down over his body; because the source crosshair moves in parallel with your brush, you'd start copying the small figures below and the towel.

4 Use a different source to clone over the rest. All you need is some empty beach, which you can find on the right, but make sure you pick an area at a similar distance from the camera or details will be out of scale. Look for an area big enough to cover the unwanted elements. Shift-click to select the source then click and drag to start painting over the body, matching your position to the source. If you selected a point at the top-right of the area to be cloned, start painting at the top-right of the area you want to cover.

5 Keep dragging to clone the empty beach over the figures. You may need to reduce the brush size to paint neatly around edges such as the yellow towel here.

6 Any unwanted features you've got from the source area can be covered by painting a nearby source over a small area.

